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Testimony by:
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The Upper Cumberland Development District Area Agency on Aging and Disability was the recipient of the Tennessee Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP) Project federal grant from the Administration on Aging beginning July 1, 2001 for a three-year period. At the end of this period, which will be June 30, 2004, we will be eligible to apply for an additional three-year project period.

The Tennessee SMP Project's mission is to reduce Medicare, Medicaid, and TennCare fraud, waste, and abuse by increasing public awareness on monitoring what is paid on the behalf of a beneficiary and how to report suspicious claims. The program recruits and trains retired professionals and others to serve as expert community resources who provide individual counseling and conduct group session presentations. Since July 2001, the program has recruited and trained approximately 250 individuals, provided one-on-one counseling to approximately 250 beneficiaries, presented to approximately 1250 beneficiaries and their caregivers in small group sessions, and has reached approximately 273,500 individuals through media activities. Because education is the key to prevention and recoupment of these lost funds, SMP has spent the first two years focussing on conducting activities that are educational in nature. As a result of the programs' efforts through December 2002, 39 allegations of potential fraud, waste, and abuse have been reported with 22 of those having been referred to the Medicare contractors for follow-up. Nationwide, the SMP programs have retrieved \$7 for every \$1 invested in their implementation.

Within the past year, the program has taken a large step by integrating all volunteer training sessions and activities in conjunction with Tennessee's State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP). Because both SHIP and SMP are designed to operate through the work of volunteers while focusing on assisting beneficiaries of the Medicare and Medicaid programs, it seemed to only make sense to combine our efforts in this perspective. Prior to this initiative, SMP Volunteers were being asked SHIP-related questions while they were out performing their SMP work, yet the SMP training was not comprehensive enough in order for them to be able to provide that area of counseling.

As a component of this initiative, SHIP has taken the step to contract out with the same nine Area Agencies on Aging and Disability across the state as SMP in order to fund nine full-time, Tennessee SMP/SHIP Volunteer Coordinators. All of these Volunteer Coordinators were cross-trained in October 2002 for both programs. These Volunteer Coordinators are responsible for recruiting, assisting in training, and maintaining all of the SHIP/SMP Volunteers' activities within their region. Since March 2003, six two-day SHIP/SMP Volunteer training sessions have been held across the state with

approximately 115 individuals becoming Certified Tennessee SHIP/SMP Volunteer Counselors.

The major segments of these training sessions' Medicare, Medicaid, and TennCare fraud, waste, and abuse components have been conducted by the Tennessee Bureau of Investigations, Office of Inspector General – Office of Investigations, and Tennessee Department of Finance and Administration – Office of Audits and Investigations. These partnering organizations are critical to Tennessee's SMP implementation and success.

In regards to challenges, the most difficult challenge to overcome has been to convince beneficiaries that if they question charges about their billing statements, that the relationship between them and their doctor will not be jeopardized because the information can be anonymous. Since Tennessee is a very rural state, in these small communities where everyone knows everyone, beneficiaries fear being a "trouble-maker" and raising these issues would result in their doctor not providing the care they need. So many of them have gone to the same doctor for decades and they simply find it not worth risking jeopardizing that relationship.